


YALI Voices: Self-described ‘troublemaker’ is a trailblazer [audio]

Amalkher Djibrine Souleymane at the 2015 Mandela 
Washington Fellowship Presidential Summit (Courtesy
photo)

“I’ve always been, I’m sorry, but a troublemaker,” Amalkher Djibrine Souleymane tells the State Department’s Todd Haskell in a YALI Voices podcast. In his introduction, Haskell acknowledges that Souleymane is “never one to back down from a fight.”

Growing up in Chad, Souleymane was encouraged to pursue an education by her family even at a young age, enrolling at age 6 as the youngest student in her class. But her teacher had other priorities than educating his students. Souleymane’s confrontation with him would be only her first challenge against authority.

She also had a big impact as a woman studying business and accounting before starting her own construction company. She didn’t necessarily like being a trailblazer and refused to let other women take the easy path. “It’s like you didn’t use the potential in you. You can do more than that,” she said.

Souleymane discusses how her experience as a 2015 Mandela Washington Fellow empowered her while exposing her to the similarities and differences between her country and those of the other Africans she studied with in New Orleans.

She tells young people that you don’t need tremendous resources to make changes “because you are everything.”

“If you have an NGO, if you have an association of young people, of women, don’t always wait for projects to be funded or waiting for money to start doing things,” she said. “You can do many things without money.”

Listen to the full podcast to learn how her drive to fight and courage to be a pioneer has only grown stronger. For Souleymane, it seems nothing is impossible!

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“YALI Voices Podcast:
Amalkher Djibrine Souleymane”

TODD HASKELL: Welcome, young African leaders. This is the YALI Voices podcast, a place to share some of the best stories from the Young African Leaders Initiative Network. My name is Todd Haskell, and I’m so glad you joined us today. Don’t forget to subscribe to the podcast and visit yali.state.gov to stay up-to-date on all things YALI.

Today I’m going to have a conversation with Amalkher Djibrine. Amalkher is an inspiring young leader and education advocate from Chad. And we talked about her experience and the Mandela Washington Fellowship, and how it has influenced her life.

She's never one to back down from a fight. And Amalkher has worked tirelessly to promote gender equality for women and advancement through education. Let's jump right into my interview with Amalkher Djibrine.

Well, good morning, Djibrine. It's really a pleasure to be here with you this morning. We're just thrilled that you've been able to come back to the United States.

I can tell you that I began working on the Mandela Washington Fellowship three years ago. And the last three years I would say a large part of my life has been dedicated to working on this program. I remember the early meetings, and what we envisaged about the program. And it's so terrific to see the fellows like you who are already making a difference in your countries and to see the fruits of this program come forward.

I know that you participated in the 2015 Mandela Washington Fellowship. You were here, and you went back to Chad last summer. Can you tell me a little bit about how the program has had an impact on you, and the work that you've been doing in Chad?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: OK, thank you very much. It's really a pleasure being here with you too. I've been of course a Fellow from last year. And I went through a lot of opportunities like networking and having people who are doing the same thing, all that.

So when I went back, I think the program had a lot of impact on me, first of all regarding the networking. Because you have a huge number of people, the same age as you, and doing great things in different countries. And you can charge, you can exchange about what you're doing.

TODD HASKELL: You mean networking with the other Fellows in the other countries.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, networking with the other Fellows. I think it's a unique opportunity that you cannot find any way in other ways. So what I'm doing in Chad exactly is I'm working in youth and woman empowerment organization called Nirvana. And I'm also representing the Women International League for Peace and Freedom, a 100-years-old organization. And the impact that the program had on me, is like if you want to make a change, you don't have to keep speaking about this change. You have to take an action and maybe people can follow you. Because in the world we have followers and we have people who would take initiative and bring other people on the group. And the thing that I did before I came back here is we have the National Council of Young People of Chad. And this council is the most important thing representing the whole young people of Chad.

But the problem is the leadership is so bad that the last three years, we didn't see anything coming out of this organization. And I tried to approach them and tell them that they have to call all of us in a national assembly, and to tell us what they did the last three years, because nothing is coming out as far as we're concerned. And we had some problems, because they know what they did and they don't want to come out and expose themselves.

Later, I decided to have meeting with young people who are sharing the same idea as I do. And every day we have more people coming to our group, the people who are not OK with the leadership of the National Council. And then we call them, they came, and we asked them. And the answer are not really interesting.

So we said we want you to resign because that's not a good thing, and we need another team because young people are not something easy in Chad, because we are more than 80% of the population. We don't have old people, sorry.

TODD HASKELL: (Laughs) No offense taken.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: So it's more than 80% of the population. And we have a lot of expectation that we cannot go through in this kind of leadership.

And this problem went to the Ministry of Youth. The Ministry of Youth first of all didn't recognize our committee as complaining a group. And then later on, the program went through to the prime minister and went to the presidency. And they call us in the meeting and they're OK with what we are saying because the other group is not able to answer our questions. And they said I think this group is right, and do you have to go to the Congress because they're asking for the Congress.

And just before I came here, they're preparing for the Congress for people to go through. And I think this is a huge impact of self-determination and self-confidence, because it cannot just go through something so risky if you are not self-confident about what you are doing.

TODD HASKELL: And you used the term there, risky. Can you talk a little bit about the obstacles and the kind of risk that you took, you think, in doing this?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, the first risk is the team itself, the former team. The president of the team is a guy that I can call a little bit dangerous because he's moving around with a gun and just intimidating people.

TODD HASKELL: Sounds a little bit dangerous.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: It's very dangerous, not a little bit. And the problem that he had is the culture is also playing a big role in that. Because if it was a guy doing all that against him, he won't spare him.

But it was a lady though. He's like, I don't know what to do with this lady. Can you please help me move her out of the committee?

TODD HASKELL: Do you think being a woman in this situation allowed you an advantage or allowed you a certain level of protection?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yes, of course. I think if I were a guy, it's going to be completely different. And even the guy won't spare me. Won't give me a chance to go that far, because he know what to do with me. But because I'm a woman, the culture is like a man, they don't fight with woman, they don't talk much, that much, with women. And he's like, she is in the middle and I don't know what to do with her.

And people took advantage of that. And the team is growing every day, because they know we are going to the end of the fight. And today I can say it was a fantastic experience, because for the first time in Chad, we had more than 1,000 young people gathered in the same room for their own future. And that was historical. And we had some media and newspapers and all that thing.

And every day people are talking about the same fight. Young people's fight of Chad? It's always the same. Where are you now? And people are calling and sending emails, like, where are you now? I want to join! Where are you now? And I think we went really very fast and very sure of what we are doing, because we are right.

And we did it. It's not yet the end, but I think because the highest authority gave the instruction to the Ministry of Youth to bring us to the National Congress of Youth. I think that's a little bit sexist.

TODD HASKELL: It's a great story. And what's your vision, do you think, for the National Youth

Council? What do you want with it when we get to the end? And if you take over?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: First of all, what we want to do is to have a very, very wonderful team. And what I mean by wonderful is a team capable of taking into consideration all the complaining of young people, because we have a lot of problems like unemployment. We have some young people go to drugs and all that. Because of that, our main leader in Chad is the National Youth Council. It's like a political position, but it represent the whole young people of country.

And the voice of this organization is very well heard by the government. But the problem that we had is the leader didn't consider the importance of the organization he's leading. And it's like other association and it's fine, but if we had a good leader who is every day reminding the government and all the stakeholders about the problem of young people, and the solution that we can propose, and what we really want, and as we know these voices are heard, we can have an output of all that and the situation it can change.

TODD HASKELL: Without the experience of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, do you think you would have done all this?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: I will maybe come back before the program. I've always been, I'm sorry, but a troublemaker. Every time I'm the first one who is complaining about something that's going wrong within the community, within the young people, and all that. So I think the program helped me a lot by giving me self-confidence and giving me an idea about the power and the energy of the team.

And also an idea about one doesn't have to sit behind and talk about, yeah, we need change. We are poor. We don't have this, we don't have that. Instead of going through the problem inside, and try to make this smallest action that you can, and other people can just follow what you are doing. So I think the program help a lot by giving this self-confidence and motivation to make positive impacts every time by the smallest action that you can bring.

TODD HASKELL: That's good. But you say you were always a troublemaker. I know you grew up near Lake Chad, and later on you moved into the capital. Can you tell me a little bit about that and some of the trouble you made when you were a young person?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: First of all, the first year of my school I had some elder sisters at home. And at that time, it's not even easy to bring daughters, girls to French schools. Because most of the parents bring their daughters to Arabic schools. And that's a culture anyways.

TODD HASKELL: To Arabic schools, not French schools.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Because we have two official languages. It depends also on the religion, but that's how they do. But our mother, she's like, I'm going to bring my daughters to French school because she saw the difference between the outcome of the two languages later on. On the career and all that thing.

So she brought my elder sister there. And every day they're going to school. I'm following them. And they're bringing me back at home because you are too young to go to school every day.

And later she said, I can't just go out every day and bring her back at home. I have to just let her go to school. And then she registered me to the school.

TODD HASKELL: How old were you at that time?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: I was too young, like 6 years old. But in Chad, they bring people at school at 7, 8, something like that. So I went to school the first year. And the surprise was I met some young girls that went to school last year telling me that I am very lucky to be in the first grade. I'm like, why?

They said the teacher is always sleeping, so you have time to do whatever you want. And I was like, what do you mean? You go and see by yourself. So when I went to the class the first day, everyone is in the class. The teacher, he closed the door and then he's left.

Like, OK. And that's really bold.

TODD HASKELL: That's terrible.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: And then everybody is playing like, whoa. I'm like OK, that's the first day. Let's see tomorrow. And then he did it for four days. And this fifth day I stayed at home.

And my father was like, why are you staying at home? You are the one who is always running to go to school. I'm like, there's no school. And when he asked me, I said the teacher is always sleeping. And he said, you're kidding me? I said that's the truth.

So he went back to school and he check by himself. He went to the supervisors and we did a big problem out of it. And the teacher was so angry on me that he was beating me every day because of what I did. So every day they ask him to leave the door open, and a supervisor are coming over all the time. So that's the beginning.

TODD HASKELL: That's the first time you caused trouble.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah. That's first time, to cause trouble. And then later on in the secondary school, we have some clubs and some union of students. And I found out that in this union, we don't have girls involved in. And I'm like, why don't you involve girls? And I had some awareness to do to the girls. Because girls are refusing to be part of the club. That's why. So I had to work hard for them to be within the club. Because the club is the only one structure able to complain the voices of all students. So it means that if we are not inside, our voices are not heard.

So we have to be in it. And later, I had some problem with the guys. Do you know how old are you? The guys, they're talking about my age. Because my age is — it's completely different than they are. And the ladies that I am pushing are also so older. And the guys are like, what are you doing? Do you know how old are you? I'm like, I know how old I am. That's why I'm not involving myself, but I'm pushing other people to get involved on it.

TODD HASKELL: Through all of this, you're making a big splash and you're doing things that I think young girls don't normally do in where you're from. What did your parents think? Were they supportive? It sounds like your dad, your father was very supportive when you were complaining about the fact that there was — well, the teacher was just sleeping. Did your parents remain supportive of you?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, they did. I think the reason why I keep doing all that is because they believe that what I'm doing is right. Because I'm always sharing what I'm doing at school and everywhere with them. There's no secrets.

When I found out that something is wrong, I'm also talking to them and then having their point of view about the problem before acting some of the times. But some of the time the acting come first,

and then I will tell them about the problem. But we're always supportive to what I'm doing. And that's why I kept doing the same thing.

TODD HASKELL: That's great. And as a girl doing this, as a woman doing this, being so active and doing that, did people ever say that wasn't the right role for a woman? Not the right role for a girl? Did they suggest that you shouldn't be doing those kind of things? Not your parents, but your peers and your teachers and other people like that?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Not really teachers bad. The students in general, they think I am different.

TODD HASKELL: I think you are.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: And I can also come back to my childhood, and that's the difference that they told me. Because when I was very young, I don't know what I did, but the parents are always like, when people are running to play with dolls and all that thing, I'm not doing the same thing. And they don't know why.

TODD HASKELL: What were you doing?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: I could be maybe reading some cartoons, like cartoon books, and all that. Because the English that I am speaking today, I started learning from a very low age. When I started speaking English, there's not all English in this city. But because I had the chance to go to the library and taking books every day, I was just negotiating with the library guy. When you go back to the capital city, can you please bring me some different books and all that?

And he started bringing some books with different language. And he said this is English. I'm like, OK. I will try English. Because there is no other baby books. I finished the cartoons.

The whole library I finished. The guy's like, why are you coming every day? I'm like, but I finished this one! I don't know what to do with this one. I already finish it. I need another one.

So I started learning English without even knowing the importance of this language. I didn't know English is spoken almost everywhere in the world. So my peers, they think I'm speaking an old language. They say, oh, she want to start speaking something that you don't understand.

But they don't even know English. We are very young to understand all that. So this difference is maybe in many sense, my childhood.

TODD HASKELL: So this spirit was born within you well before you ever came on the Mandela Washington Fellowship. You had this urge to learn, you read all the books in the library, you moved on. And what was it like when you went on to N'Djamena and you began to become a teenager and a little bit older. I know you started a business.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah. When we came to N'Djamena and I went to high school, I've also got involved in the school students' association. As we are doing business school, in the class, in the MBA classes we don't see girls. And at the beginning, I really wanted to go to architecture, but there is no school for architecture in Chad. And they said if you want to go to architecture, let's prepare some papers for you and get a visa for you for France and all that thing. And when they counted the times, I would be losing one year. I'm like, I'm not going to lose this one year. Maybe I will think about that later. But I went for accounting and business administration.

TODD HASKELL: In Chad?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, in Chad. But the problem is the people that we have in the class, most of them are men. And they have or already started doing some business. But we don't have girls.

The teacher is like, are you sure, did you start any business. I'm like, not yet. I don't have any business yet. Are you sure you want to go to the business schools? Yes, I'm going to go to business schools.

And I asked question, why we don't have ladies in there? And when I was talking with some ladies, they want to go and have a degree, work in an office, get some salary, and that's it. So almost all of them are like, I don't know, but if I got a wonderful job, I think I would be successful. But the problem is I can't call it success because it's normal. Everybody who has a degree, one of the day get a job and have some salary.

And it's like you didn't use the potential in you. You can do more than that. And I was working in a business, not my own, but in a network marketing business, where two years after I found myself taking care of 400 official distributors in my own computer. When the new distributor came to the office, they were like, we are looking for Amalkher. And that's me!

Not you. I'm looking for Amalkher. You're going to come back to me. And when they come back, they're like, are you sure you are the manager of — it's called Edmark, Edmark International. Are you sure you are the manager of Edmark International?

I'm like, yeah, I am. It's not easy, but you know, it's just internet. That's the problem when in the country people are not more involved in the new technology for information and communication. It seems really strange.

TODD HASKELL: People didn't believe that you were the head because you were a woman. And they expected to see a man having all this responsibility. Is that right?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Even if it's not a man, they expect to see an older woman, not a child. I'm sorry. Not like — somebody like that. That's not to you. I'm looking for somebody else.

But the problem is the gender problem exist. That's the reality in Chad. That people don't believe in the potential of woman. That's a real problem that we are fighting with the Women International for Peace and Freedom. And because you can feel it everywhere.

Because later on in 2012, have created my own building company that people like you are now crazy. Now you confirm that you're crazy. The problem is when I was looking for the license, the registration of my company, all throughout the process, people are calling me from the beginning, in the middle, at the end. Amalkher — because some of them know me — are you sure you are going to create a building company? I'm like, OK, yeah.

Did you see Amalkher in the paper? Yes. So just keep moving it. So when I had the company out, the problem was the gender, and that's clear. Because I targeted the government situations because we have some maintenance problem.

It's not a matter of just having a building. But you have to take care of the building to be a beautiful one. Because if you would just build it and leave it, that's not good at all. So my company is focusing on building and the maintenance of this buildings. And when there is a contract going out in a newspaper, and then I went for the contact, most of the time I'm out.

And when I decided not to just go for the competitions, but go by myself presenting my company to

the people and leaving them the overview of the company in case they can maybe call me for anything that they want. But the problem is, they don't believe that you can do that. Yeah. No, I can't give you my building's contract because I don't think you can do it the right way. Or I don't think you can build it the way I really want it. So it's like they don't believe in it really. And it's very hard.

TODD HASKELL: Have you been able to overcome that with the businesses? Is the business successful?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, I can say it's successful today because I've changed my strategy. Because going to the people that don't believe in the work that you will do is not a solution. I can maybe come back later by proving them the contrary or the opposite. But now I am targeting the international NGOs, the people coming from outside that believe the work that a woman can do is the same that the work that a man can do.

TODD HASKELL: It's often better.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: So I'm targeting this people like the embassies, and the NGOs, and the United Nations organizations. I have some small contacts for the beginning. And I think that's the success. Because if you already start having some contracts and doing a wonderful work, there will just notice the work that you're doing. And they will just come back to you by asking your service, because the service is perfect.

TODD HASKELL: So how did you first hear about the Mandela Washington Fellowship? Was it on the internet? Did friends tell you about it? When did you first hear about it for the first time?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: The first time I heard about is because I am in the newsletter of something called Opportunity Desk. That every time they give the available opportunities that there are. And I came to the one, Mandela Washington. And when I went through it, I found out that it's a very interesting program. And I didn't hesitate a minute.

I directly applied for it. And it was a surprise because they select people from 25 to 35. But at the time I was 24. And they said they will consider some successful people under 25. But I applied, but when the result come, I was like, that's wonderful. And I didn't expect to have such a good experience here.

TODD HASKELL: Well tell me about that. So you applied, you did your interview, you got selected. Obviously, you must have been very excited about that.

You took your first trip to the United States. And I think you went to New Orleans, right? You were in Tulane University to attend the six-week class. What were your first impressions when you arrived in the United States?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: I've been at United States before, like two times. But this time was different because I've been there for vacancies and something else, a conference of one week.

TODD HASKELL: For a vacation, or for — right.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: But this time is a long time, and it was different. When I came here I've been in New Orleans, that I can call a unique city because of the diversity and people

are very friendly there.

And I also want to point out the fact that we came here on the Ramadan day, Ramadan time. But it is so strange. We didn't feel anything bad. Like everybody is taking care of us. You are fasting? OK. We can keep some food for you. People are so good. Every time I come back home, I'm like, these people are really wonderful people. Because they don't really care about any differences. They're all the same.

And if you have something, they're ready to take care of you. And the program was also wonderful because we had different experience. We went out for some institution to see how they work. And we had some cultural night. And I think in New Orleans, we experienced many things like food, different cultures. New Orleans it's like a city that's always welcoming.

TODD HASKELL: So you're there. You're in Tulane, and there's 24 other Fellows from across the continent. What was that experience like meeting Africans from across the continent, and spending so much time with them?

Were you surprised by how much you had in common? Or were you surprised by how different you felt? Or what was your experience there?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: It was, I can call it again, a unique experience. Because when we are in a team, we sometimes have to forget about our differences and come together for one goal. Some of the Americans are calling Africa a country. I wish it is a country because sometimes you have to feel unique. You have to feel like the same people from the same place, and addressing same problems.

And that's what I felt when I was in the team. Because every evening we are sitting together talking serious problems. Because most of the time we have groups, and when they have free time it's just to dance or having a good time. But we're like no. We are not doing it every day. Some of the day we have to sit and talk about our different problems all over our countries and see what you can propose from me, what I can propose for you. And it was a very constructive. We kept doing it because we have created a Whatsapp group of the 25 people that went to Tulane.

TODD HASKELL: So you remain in touch with them?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, we remain in touch and we've been talking about serious problem about our work, what we do in our country, and giving contributions, ideas.

TODD HASKELL: Were there any fellows in particular you became very close friends with? Or that you learned a lot about their country?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, of course. And that's natural because when you are in a group, you become close to some people and not everyone. Of course I had a close friend from Kenya. And that talked much to me, because I've never been in Kenya. And today I know a lot about Kenya thanks to him.

And he was also asking about Chad. So it's like we are sharing different experiences. And at the end of the day, you've never been in Chad, but you know a lot about Chad because there's somebody telling you the reality. Somebody who is within the problems, within the every days aspect of Chad, telling you the reality of the country. So it was a wonderful experience.

TODD HASKELL: Would you recommend it to other Chadians? That they apply for the Fellowship?

Do you recommend it on a regular basis now when you're back?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah. When I went back, the #YALILearns courses that we have, I've been using them throughout the year. Every time we are calling young people to come to the #YALILearns and that's the opportunity to talk to them about the YALI itself. Because most of them have heard about it. And when you say, it's English. Most of them are going back because we have wonderful guys. We have wonderful young people doing magic things in the country. But the only one problem that they have is the Fellowship, it's all an English. Like even the interview in the embassies are in English.

So that's the only one problem we have. But myself, I'm recommending this program to every young person in the country. And as a matter of fact, we had this big estimating that I was talking about earlier. And I didn't forget to remind them about YALI, because it's nothing to do with YALI, right? But I reminded of them because I'm like, oh, this is the chance. I'm not going to be able to bring all of them again, so let's talk about YALI and tell them that it's going to be in November or something like that. And let them apply more and more. And the result is the first year we had three Chadians here in 2014. We had four in 2015. Now we have 10. We can say it's because they became 1,000. But I don't think so. I think the reason is we mobilized a lot of young people to apply for it.

TODD HASKELL: That's a terrific story. And let me say also at the end of the six weeks, first you go through the six weeks of training. You have these terrific opportunities to meet people from across Africa, obviously people across New Orleans. There's this academic training. But then you get the chance to come to Washington and attend the summit. What was the highlight of the summit for you?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: This summit was magic. First of all, because it's not only 25 of us, it's 500. And you see a young person every time going this way or the other and from the same group. And what is fantastic is you can imagine the potential of every one of the Fellows because I can think it's explosive potential that all of us have. And I believe that every young person has potential. The reason why we have many problems all across the globe is because some of them don't know how to use it positively. Then they go for the negative way. And that's why we have a lot of problems today.

So we can maybe help them go to the positive way by doing something like this program. I think this program is phenomenal. So in the summit, besides meeting all of them and having the name and faces book, that is like a treasure, we hold also the opportunity to meet the President of the United States in person.

TODD HASKELL: What was that like?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: It was really fantastic. I can say because I've never met my own president, I didn't expect to meet him. But through this program I had the chance to meet him. And most importantly, the message that he has to the African youth.

TODD HASKELL: What is that message?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: That's the most important part. And we were talking about — the president was telling us about the good governance. To build a society, we have some secrets. And the secrets are, you have to start from the baby. You can't just leave a child having whatever

education, and then you come after he's 18 years old.

And it's like, why did you do that? Don't do it this way. No, he's not going to hear you, right? Because you didn't take care of him since his childhood.

So if we want to address and bring solution to our problems, we have to go to the basic level of education, of health. Because it's a matter of awareness. It's not like every problem should be addressed only by money. But we can address the biggest problem in the world just because we know how to address them. But awareness, telling people the right way, bringing them from this bad path to another good one.

So I think his message about the good governance, the human rights, because that's the main problem we have there, the corruption. You can talk about corruption in public in Chad, because it's normal. If you want to address all that, it's true all of us here today. The Fellows and going back to the children going to school now. We have to help them since that level.

So when they grow up, they will grow up with a different point of view, grow up with a different picture of what they want to do, and the things will change automatically. We don't have to be behind. Everything will change by itself. So I think that's the message that I got from him. And I will try my best to make it work in my community.

TODD HASKELL: What really comes through to me listening to you speak is that all your life people were telling you things that you can't do, and you insisted on doing them anyway and you made it work. You've been a tremendous change maker even before you ever came on the Fellowship. And I congratulate you for that.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Thank you.

TODD HASKELL: But going back to Chad after this tremendous experience in the United States where you got to do the academic training, got to go to the summit, meet people from all over Africa, and meet President Obama, you go back to Chad. Did that take it to the next level for you? Did you feel even more empowered?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yes, very, very empowered. And very empowered because someone has seen what I've been doing. Something like that. And it is encouraging me to do even more. It's not a matter of what I'm doing. I am every day. But it's much of the impact that what you're doing is making in your community and in the people living in it. That's why I am reminding young people every time that if you have an NGO, if you have an association of young people, of women, don't always wait for projects to be funded or waiting for money to start doing things. Because you are everything. You are everything.

You can do many things without money. You can decide making difference and letting people notice the difference that you are doing without \$1. So that's the secret that many people don't know. Because we have many associations in Chad. And because of the program, as you were saying, when I went back I was trying to bring feedbacks from many of the association of young people and women about a problem, like why you're not going through? What is happening? Why you're not developing yourself or developing the NGO? And this answer that I'm having from them is the same. We have this project, and it didn't get funded. And I have also this project and that project and no money. So we decided, because we have created another organization called

Collectif Des Associations Pour La Citoyenneté Et La Sauvegarde Des Acquis Démocratiques Au Tchad.

TODD HASKELL: For Citizenship and the Safeguarding of Democracy.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: And Democratic Achievements, something like that. But through this organization, we are organizing special training to the NGOs and association leaders to let them know how they can get started even with zero. And making impacts. You don't have to underestimate your impact. The smallest impact you can do. So we are training them like association management. How to work without anything.

Because there is some of the thing that you can do like the training that we are doing. We didn't get any money. But the training is the key of everything.

TODD HASKELL: That's great.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Even in your own organization, you can start doing training to people. And you happening. That's the action that we're looking for. And today, just like we are, the office, mine is so crowded because every day we have many people inside. Can you tell me how they do this? How to do that? But the staff, we have a lot of people working with us. So we are playing the role of like councils, people giving advices.

Finally, we found ourselves doing that. But that's not the first goal of our own organization. So the goal is moving from here to that because people are asking for our help.

TODD HASKELL: You're shining a light, and I think people are coming towards it, because you're such a tremendous example. It strikes me, you've accomplished more in your life than many people do over their whole life, and yet you're — if I can say it — you're still young. Where do you see yourself in 20 or 25 years more? What would you like to achieve, ultimately? And I mean both for yourself, but also for Chad.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: I believe if you need to make a bigger change, you have to be able to affect the biggest part of the country and of the population. So where I see myself in — as you said, it's a long time, right? 20 years? 25?

TODD HASKELL: It goes like that (snaps fingers), believe me.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: It goes like that because I can also think about being the first president of Chad, a woman. Because for me, it's not a surprise. It's not something impossible. It's possible for everyone to think that way.

But the reason behind that could be different. You could think about that for you to have the biggest power to affect positively, and so things will grow quickly in your country. We need true people doing true things and right thing, fair things for the whole planet.

TODD HASKELL: And I think the lesson of your life too, is that you can't let people tell you no, it's too hard, it can't be done, because you've accomplished so many things.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: I hope so.

TODD HASKELL: We're going to probably close. But I do want to give you a chance, if there is any other message you want to deliver. This has been a fascinating conversation.

And I always feel so much better about the future of Africa when I talk to its young people. And I particularly feel that after this conversation. But what else would you like to tell the folks who are

listening to us now?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: What I want to tell the folks who are listening to us is to think about only one community, only one people, all over the world. We can also think about particularly the continent of Africa. And talking about this special program of YALI, let's think of being only one family, same people with same problem, and addressing all this problem together. Let's come together to address this same problem. And let's stop putting barriers between all of us. And that's why working on the RAB, the regional advisory board — I'm also every day reminding people of the RAB is divided into three regions.

TODD HASKELL: Just for our listeners, the regional advisory boards are YALI Fellows from around West Africa, in your case, who were elected by the other Fellows. And there's 10 of you. And you work together in organizing YALI activities regionally.

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: Yeah, that's it. So it doesn't mean that the YALI group, it's divided. Let's think it's only one Africa. That's the message that I want to give to people.

TODD HASKELL: Great. Djibrine, this has been such a fascinating conversation. I know there's a lot of people out there who will want to reach out and have a conversation with you on social media or however, what's the best way that they can reach out and talk to you?

AMALKHER DJIBRINE SOULEYMANE: The best way they can reach me is through Facebook with my name,

Amalkher Djibrine Souleymane. And also through Skype with Amalkher88.

TODD HASKELL: Great, thank you. Thanks so much for listening, and make sure to subscribe so you don't miss out on any of our fascinating interviews with other young African leaders from across the continent. Join the YALI Network at yali.state.gov and be part of something bigger.

Our theme music is "E Go Happen" by Grace Jerry, and produced by the Presidential Precinct. The YALI Voices podcast is brought to you by the United States Department of State, and as part of the Young African Leaders Initiative funded by the U.S. government. Thanks everyone.

[Five Ways to Keep Girls in School](#)

(USAID)



Educating girls is important. The U.S. Agency for International Development says children born to [educated mothers](#) are twice as likely to survive past age 5. In the last decade, there's been a remarkable increase in the number of girls in developing countries attending primary school. But there's also been a remarkable drop-off in the number of adolescent girls who continue their

education. While 87 percent enroll in primary school, only 39 percent graduate from secondary school.

Here are five ways to help girls realize their full potential through education.

Put schools where girls can get to them

(USAID)



In rural areas, schools are often far from girls' homes. Research in Nigeria and Kenya has demonstrated that as the distance a girl has to travel to school increases, the likelihood of that student missing school or dropping out altogether increases too.

Keep girls in school safe

(USAID)



When girls have to travel long distances to school, they are vulnerable to attack and harassment. In cultures that discourage education for women, girls are subjected to persecution, violence and intimidation in and around the classroom. Communities that work to ensure girls' safety at school improve girls' educational outcomes.

Train teachers to be gender aware

(USAID)



Sometimes teachers and textbooks reinforce the idea that girls are less intelligent than boys or only show girls and women as household workers and caregivers. Teachers trained to counteract these stereotypes can help girls discover the opportunities education creates for them. Having a significant number of female teachers also helps to fight discrimination against girls and provides role models for female students.

Ease the workload of girls at home

(USAID)



Household work such as carrying water, preparing food and washing clothes falls disproportionately to girls and women throughout the developing world. It is the primary reason girls are kept home from school. Spreading the burden of chores across all members of the family helps girls succeed.

Get rid of obstacles that keep girls out of school

(USAID)



In many developing nations, especially in rural areas, girls don't attend school during menstruation because they don't have access to sanitary pads or running water. In Uganda, the female speaker of

parliament has led a campaign to make sanitary pads more widely available to keep girls in school.

To learn more about the importance of girls' education, take the YALI Network Online Course, "[Understanding Human Rights of Women and Girls](#)." Join #Africa4Her and tell us how you will be bold for change at yali.state.gov/4her.

Highlights from a #YALICHAT with Ambassador Cathy Russell

U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues Cathy Russell held a Twitter chat with the YALI Network on Wednesday, March 2nd to talk about challenges facing women in Africa and to support the #Africa4Her campaign.



Excited to join some of Africa's most promising leaders in a few minutes for a [#YALICHAT](#) on [#Africa4Her](#).

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) [March 2, 2016](#)

Ambassador Russell started with a question for the YALI Network...

Before I get to your questions, I have a question for you: What challenges do women and girls face in your community? [#Africa4Her](#) [#YALICHAT](#)

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) [March 2, 2016](#)

And received some critical answers...

[@ambcathyrussell](#) [@yalinetwork](#) The general notion that women are inferior to men [#Africa4Her](#) [#YALICHAT](#)

— Anthony Ekene (@AnthonyEkene) [March 2, 2016](#)



[@AmbCathyRussell](#) [@YALINetwork](#) In my country women face physical abuse which in most scenarios end up in murder cases. [#YALICHAT](#) [#Africa4Her](#) — Deon Shekuza (@dshekuza) [March 2, 2016](#)

[@AmbCathyRussell](#) [@YALINetwork](#) No access to entrepreneurial skills and self development [#YALICHAT](#) — Victoria Okosun (@vickyslyrics) [March 2, 2016](#)

Then it was on to answer questions from the YALI Network!

[@IMaluza](#) Gender-based violence needs to be treated as a crime, not a family matter. [#Africa4Her](#) [#YALICHAT](#) — Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) [March 2, 2016](#)



[@IsabellaMuthoni](#) A key piece is promoting education for girls. Women's empowerment starts with girls' education. [#Africa4Her](#) — Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) [March 2, 2016](#)

[@dgeniusjude](#) We see four keys areas: women's economic and political participation, addressing GBV, supporting girls education. [#Africa4Her](#)
— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) [March 2, 2016](#)



[@admasb](#) [@YALINetwork](#) My mother has a huge inspiration for me because she taught me and my sisters that we could do anything. [#Africa4Her](#)
— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) [March 2, 2016](#)

[@DassilvaManga](#) Success is having the opportunity and ability to do what you want in life. There is no one path to success. [#Africa4Her](#)

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) [March 2, 2016](#)



[@Sandytey](#) I'd encourage you to look into local village savings and loan initiatives and efforts to see if there are local options.

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) [March 2, 2016](#)

With hundreds of questions submitted, your curiosity and engagement continues to drive the #Africa4Her campaign to new heights!

I just heard that we've received over 12,000 pledges for [#Africa4Her](#) — that's amazing! [#YALICHAT](#)

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) [March 2, 2016](#)

Ambassador Russell signed off with a renewed pledge to the YALI Network...

I'm thrilled to take the [#Africa4Her](#) pledge again this year. I hope you'll join me: <https://t.co/XHByfgwTqW> [pic.twitter.com/eor82y8Rrc](#)

— Cathy Russell (@AmbCathyRussell) [March 3, 2016](#)

The YALI Network looks forward to more #YALICHATS with Ambassador Russell!

[@AmbCathyRussell](#) Thank you for the time you spared to share with us, We a humbled. [#Africa4Her](#) [#YALICHAT](#) [@usmissionuganda](#) [@YALINetwork](#)

— ABEJA JULIET (@123_abeja) [March 3, 2016](#)

[@AmbCathyRussell](#) we will join you, lets work for our beloved ones together . [#Africa4Her](#)

— yakob g/egzabher (@yakob_g) [March 3, 2016](#)
